



May 20, 2020

To,

Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Secretary Home
Empowered Group- Strategic issues related to Lockdown
Ministry of Home Affairs, North Block,
New Delhi- 110001

Subject: Recommendations for effective education response to Covid-19

Dear Mr. Bhalla,

Oxfam India is a national level NGO which works in the various sectors of Public Health, Education, Social Protection, Gender Justice and Economic Justice among others. We are actively involved in humanitarian support in the COVID crisis in 14 states. We are currently in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. More than 22 crore children have been affected by the temporary closure of schools. If preventive measures are not taken, many of these children might never return even after schools reopen. It is estimated that girls from disadvantaged families might lose 50% of their total years of education¹ if pro-active measures are not taken.

We understand and appreciate that you and the Ministry are already responding to the situation. We particularly appreciate some of the steps such as issuing orders for continued delivery of mid-day meals which will help support the nutritional needs of disadvantaged children, during this difficult time. Based on our experience, however, we recommend the following actions to ensure an inclusive and rights-based approach:




- 1. PROTECT MIGRANT CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION**– Lakhs of migrants and their families are returning home to their villages. To ensure that migrant children continue to access education, issue instructions to state governments to identify such children through teachers, SMC and PRI members and facilitate their admission into nearby government schools and ensure that they receive due entitlements, including MDM, textbooks and uniforms. Admission should be facilitated without asking for supporting documents.
- 2. Ensure child safety and protection** – There has been a 50% increase² in calls reporting child abuse and violence on helplines nationally. To ensure child safety and protection, issue guidelines to states to activate child protection committees at district and block level to monitor and respond quickly to cases of violence and abuse. In addition, the guidelines should ensure that teachers and SMC members to remain in touch with children in families with history of domestic violence to minimize possibilities of child abuse.

¹ [Girls Education and Covid 19-Malala Fund](#)

² <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/coronavirus-lockdown-govt-helpline-receives-92000-calls-on-child-abuse-and-violence-in-11-days/article31287468.ece>

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- 3. Safeguard food security of children** –50% rural³ households have reported a reduction in their food intake during the lockdown. This is likely to exacerbate malnutrition among children in India, of whom 36%⁴ are already underweight and therefore, have lower resistance to infections. It is imperative that their food security be ensured through home delivery of cooked meals/dry rations under the Mid-Day Meal as well as ICDS scheme. Instruct states to ensure coverage of migrant children under these schemes. Coverage of children aged 3-6 is particularly crucial. Ensure that a rapid response team is setup in all states for quick resolution of grievances and ensure 100% coverage of beneficiaries under the two schemes. In addition, issue instructions to states for ensuring uninterrupted supply of food to students residing in residential schools and hostels.

- 4. ISSUE GUIDELINES TO ENSURE DELIVERY OF TEXTBOOKS AND PRINTED learning Materials-** Only 15% rural households have access to the internet⁵. Issue guidelines to states to ensure that a few pages of printed material of daily exercise for children are included with the MDM and ICDS rations being distributed, to ensure that 85% of children who do not have access to digital infrastructure, continue to have access to learning. In a survey, 68%⁶ parents have said that they need textbooks to supplement digital modes. The Odisha⁷ government has already issued instructions for delivery of textbooks to students' homes. In the past, states such as Bihar had transferred funds to parents for purchase of textbooks. However, this year's PAB (Project Approval Board) should ensure that funds are allocated for actual distribution of textbooks and that all states ensure home delivery of textbooks to all children in government schools, in line with MHRD guidelines, to enable students to return to the realm of learning.

- 5. ISSUE NOTIFICATION UNDER NDMA** to put in place a moratorium over private school fees- An estimated 12 crore Indians have lost their jobs⁸ and a larger number will suffer pay cuts. It is imperative to ensure that private schools do not hike fees or ask for advance fees during this crisis. To do so, issue a notification under the provisions of Section 10 (2) (1) of the Disaster Management Act, putting in place a moratorium on private schools collecting or hiking fees until normalcy is restored. NCPCR has already issued a notification in this regard (F. No. NCPCR/2020-21/SF/EDU). Additionally, issue a notification that protects children's right to education, particularly those enrolled under Section 12-1-c by ensuring that they are provided with devices

³ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/nearly-half-of-rural-households-eating-fewer-items-less-number-of-times-to-overcome-covid-crisis-survey/articleshow/75703178.cms>

⁴ NFHS 2015-16

⁵ National Sample Survey on Education 2017-18

⁶ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/68-parents-say-their-children-need-textbooks-for-online-school-classes/articleshow/75138341.cms>

⁷ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/odisha-govt-issues-sops-for-distribution-of-textbooks-to-school-students/story-cd3dcdvxTtDFpFyeFsaUdK.html>

⁸ CMIE



and free data packs to access digital classes being delivered by private schools. A PIL⁹ on this issue has already been filed in the Delhi High Court.

- 6. PREVENT DROPOUT AND ENSURE SCHOOLS ARE SAFE TO ATTEND- Issue** guidelines to states to ensure that schools that were used as quarantine/ration distribution centres are thoroughly disinfected prior to re-opening. Currently, only 54% schools¹⁰ have toilet, drinking water and handwashing facilities. Guidelines should also stress the necessity of making adequate WASH facilities (water, soap and functional toilets) available in all schools before they reopen. Estimates show that disadvantaged students would have lost 30%¹¹ of their previous year's learning due to the lost instructional time. This coupled with the economic crisis increases the likelihood of dropouts. Instruct states to recover lost instructional time and prevent dropout by putting in place accelerated learning interventions and supporting SMCs to identify children (particularly girls) at risk of dropping out, entering child labour or being trafficked, and to facilitate their re-entry into schools.

We would be keen to submit our views or contribute to any state task-forces/committees being setup to respond to the covid-19 crisis and would like to offer technical expertise and any other form of support that might be needed.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Amitabh Behar
Chief Executive Officer

⁹ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/pil-in-delhi-high-court-seeks-free-laptop-phones-to-poor-kids-for-online-classes-during-covid-19-lockdown/article31535837.ece>

¹⁰ UDISE 2016-17

¹¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/summer-learning-loss-what-is-it-and-what-can-we-do-about-it/>

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